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Reflections on a Pandemic Year

Eric Goldman

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Reflections on a Pandemic Year

Eric Goldman
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Despite increasingly ominous news reports, work proceeded normally in January and February 2020. For example, in early February 2020, the law school held a major in-person conference called WIPIP with 80+ attendees.

Things changed dramatically by early March. On March 9, 2020, I nervously flew to Washington D.C. for a conference presentation. Only about 25% of the conference registrants attended, and attendees felt uncomfortable being in each other's presence. I was so distraught about the contagion risks that, after flying home March 10, we immediately pulled our kids from in-person school (the schools transitioned to remote learning a few days later).

How the pandemic shutdown has affected me:

Working at Home. It took a few months to adjust to working exclusively at home. I needed better A/V equipment, a faster Internet connection, and a more ergonomic setup, and addressing those issues drained my productivity. Also, my kids and wife don't respect my workspace boundaries, leading to multiple interruptions throughout the day. I save some commute time, but I have no clear division between work and personal time. As a result, I worked most waking hours for a year without a single day off (until a short vacation in early April 2021). It was exhausting.

Teaching. Transitioning to online teaching was hard. I spent dozens of hours during summer 2020 learning how to teach online, then dozens more hours adapting my class (which I had taught 23x before) for the online format. Actually teaching the class online took 2-3x as much time than an in-person class would have required. While teaching online, I constantly worry that some technology will critically fail mid-class/mid-lecture. Overall, online teaching is time-consuming and exhausting.

Conference Presentations/Traveling. Pre-pandemic, I gave about 40 talks/year and flew about 2x/month (about 75,000 air miles/year). I haven't been on a plane since March 10, 2020, which has saved me a lot of travel time. Nevertheless, because I can easily make remote appearances, I've done more public talks than ever—30 in the first four months of 2021 (over 2x/week).

Personally. My family has been remarkably privileged during the pandemic. Our house is big enough to accommodate us all, no one got the virus, I have job security, I thrived professionally, and my kids have done well academically. Yet, my family and I have "lost" little things due to the shutdown—such as my daughter's 8th grade graduation, my son's tour of prospective colleges, in-person holiday celebrations (Zoom gatherings aren't the same), and scheduled vacations to Bali, Kenya, Hawaii, and more. Collectively, these losses diminished our lives. Most of all, we miss the in-person interactions that remain so vital to building strong relationships.

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